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United Nations information centres in 1999: allocation of resources from the regular budget of the United Nations

Report of the Secretary-General

I. Introduction

1. The United Nations information centres promote greater public understanding of the work of the Organization by reaching out to all segments of civil society and raising priority issues of the United Nations that touch the lives of people everywhere. They maintain close working relationships with the local media, develop partnerships with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to broaden information campaigns and cooperate with local educators in developing curricula for teaching about the United Nations.

2. In its resolution 54/82 B of 6 December 1999, the General Assembly called upon the Secretary-General to continue to study ways and means of rationalizing and effecting equitable disbursement of available resources to all United Nations information centres and to report to the Committee on Information at its twenty-second session in May 2000.

3. The present report, submitted in response to the above request of the General Assembly, includes information on major activities of the 65 information centres operating in 1999; ongoing efforts to strengthen the information centres; and the resources available for the operation of the information centres. The report does not include information on the work of the United Nations information services in Geneva and Vienna, whose budgetary allocations are separately identified under section 26, Public information, of the programme budget for the biennium 1998-1999, nor does it deal with the information services of the regional commissions, which operate within the administrative and budgetary mandates of each commission.

II. Highlights of the activities of the information centres in 1999

4. By developing public information programmes tailored to meet the concerns of local audiences in the countries they serve during the period under review, the United Nations information centres continued to demonstrate their strength as the voice of the Organization at the local level.

5. United Nations special observances, such as the International Year of Older Persons, provided the information centres with the opportunity to make a greater impact by involving local partners in public information programming. Such partnerships resulted in a broad range of outreach activities held under the theme "Towards a society for all ages", including seminars, concerts and special events. The information centres played a catalytic role in uniting young and old,

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NGOs and relevant authorities to reflect on the needs of senior citizens and helped raise awareness of the vital contribution that seniors make in all sectors of society.

6. Among the activities organized by the centres to commemorate the International Year of Older Persons, the following merit special mention: the United Nations Information Centre in Accra and the Ministry of Employment and Social Welfare of Ghana organized a "Walk for Life" in which 1,000 people took part; the United Nations Information Centre in Buenos Aires, in cooperation with the advertising firm Ogilvy and Mather, created and placed a series of thought-provoking public service announcements in national and regional newspapers featuring senior citizens; the United Nations Information Centre in Islamabad and local offices of the organizations of the United Nations system in Pakistan held an athletic competition for the elderly; the United Nations Information Centre in Moscow encouraged a local business to donate funds to the Older Persons Centre, enabling it to purchase mobile shower units for residents who are restricted in movement; and the United Nations Information Centre in Washington, D.C. held a briefing on the issue of ageing at the National Press Club with the participation of officials from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund.

7. Similarly, the information centres brought together government leaders, health care workers and women's groups to examine the dynamic interplay between population and development in connection with the special session of the General Assembly on the review and appraisal of the implementation of the Programme of Action of the International Conference on Population and Development. A number of centres translated information materials specially prepared for the event into local languages, provided for their wide distribution and also had them posted on their web sites. In addition, the information centres organized press briefings and contacted editorial writers and arranged for radio and television interviews, all of which resulted in media coverage of the issues before the special session. Several information centres also organized round-table discussions with the participation of experts on population issues from the United Nations Population Fund and from civil society to reflect on the outcome of the special session.

8. Partnerships also formed the cornerstone of outreach activities organized by the information centres for United Nations Day. Among the special events for the Day were an inter-agency fair organized in Rome in cooperation with the office of the Mayor and visited by some 30,000 people, as well as a public march in Santa Fé de Bogotá that brought together a million people in support of peace.

9. Excellent cooperation between the information centres and United Nations peacekeeping operations was continued in 1999, as illustrated by the hosting of the exhibit prepared by the Department of Public Information on "United Nations Peacekeeping: A Half-Century of Experience". The United Nations information centres in Bonn, Brussels and Tokyo and the United Nations Information Service in Vienna hosted this exhibit during 1999. Planning is under way for the exhibit to travel to other countries.

10. Information backstopping has been a mainstream activity of all information centres in 1999, having given strong informational support to the peacemaking missions in East Timor and Kosovo. The United Nations Information Centre in Lisbon extended assistance to the United Nations Mission in East Timor (UNAMET) through the production and distribution of civil education materials in Portuguese, educational briefings on the voter registration process for the East Timorese living in Portugal and organization of a public debate on the question of East Timor. The Centre also made arrangements for the production of a public service announcement on voter registration, aired on national television. Its outreach efforts contributed to the extensive coverage of UNAMET by the Portuguese media. The United Nations Information Centre in Jakarta issued press releases in Bahasa Indonesian and English on the location of the voter registration centres in Jakarta and held a press conference to explain the objectives of the referendum. The centre also translated the agreements on East Timor into Bahasa Indonesian and Tetum. The United Nations Information Centre in Sydney also lent its support to UNAMET, in particular by providing the relevant information to the East Timorese living in Australia.

11. Similarly, the information centres served as local sources of information to the media on the United Nations Interim Administration in Kosovo (UNMIK), closely monitoring action by the Security Council and providing local-language translations of major documentation posted on the Kosovo page on the United Nations web site, while senior staff in many

centres also gave interviews on this issue to national and regional news organizations.

12. The training of the staff of the information centres remained a priority in 1999. In September, the Department of Public Information organized a briefing programme in Geneva for National Information Officers and Information Assistants from 18 information centres in Africa and the countries of the former Soviet Union. The programme focused on the important role that the centres play in giving a local voice to the Organization's global vision, working effectively with the partners in the United Nations system in presenting a unified image of the United Nations and making maximum use of communications technology. In addition, an Internet training workshop for 12 Library Assistants was held at United Nations Headquarters in December 1999. The workshop was successful in showcasing the research options available on the United Nations web site and in demonstrating the usefulness of the Internet databases.

13. The Internet has become increasingly important to the information centres as an additional information outreach tool. To date, 30 centres have created local-language web sites. In addition to up-to-date information on centre activities, these sites provide a link to the United Nations web site. The information centres report that, as more people gain easy access to general information on the United Nations on the Internet, there has been an increase in demand for in-depth information requiring research and assistance of the centre staff. As such, the Internet has not replaced the traditional means of information outreach, including personal contacts with the local media and representatives of NGOs, or the production of local language publications and broadcast programming by the centres, but provided an additional means for dissemination of information.

14. As the year drew to a close, the information centres were planning millennium events to highlight the continued relevance of the objectives and activities of the United Nations to the concerns of people everywhere and to promote the Secretary-General's millennium message. As a direct result of efforts by the information centres, the Secretary-General's videotaped millennium message was displayed on jumbo screens and broadcast around the world. By the beginning of January 2000, there had been 119 radio and 108 television reports on his message, as well as some 212 newspaper reports worldwide.

III. Allocation of resources

15. In 1999, the operations of 61 United Nations information centres were funded from the regular programme budget of the United Nations and from Government contributions. Owing to local conditions, four centres remained non-operational. Efforts are now under way to reactivate the information centres in Managua and Monrovia during 2000, in cooperation with the host Governments and the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The Department of Public Information also provided staffing and operational resources to the United Nations information services in Bangkok, Beirut, Geneva and Vienna, as well as to information components of the United Nations offices in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Eritrea, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Uzbekistan.

16. During 1999, the number of United Nations information centres integrated with field offices of UNDP stood at 18, reflecting no increase over the 1992 level. Fifteen additional centres did not have staff members of the Department as directors, however, in response to the Department's request, UNDP resident representatives served as acting directors in those locations.

17. Human resources continue to be the most essential asset for the effective performance of the information centres. In order to maintain the desired level of effectiveness, the centres must maintain adequate numbers of trained staff, both in the Professional and General Service categories. In 1999, 104 centre staff members participated in training, mainly in the use of modern information technology. As noted above, training seminars were also organized for National Information Officers from centres in Africa and information components of United Nations offices, as well as for Library Assistants from selected locations.

18. During 1998 and 1999, the overall staffing level for all centres was reduced by more than 10 per cent in comparison with the previous biennium, and by more than 40 per cent in comparison with the level of posts in 1990. Only 228 local-level posts, including 44 National Information Officer posts, were available to the network of United Nations information centres in 1999. While in 1992 the centres had 65 Professional posts (including two extrabudgetary posts), only 35 such posts remained in 1999. This figure excludes

posts available for the United Nations information services in Geneva and Vienna and for the information components of the United Nations offices. The partnerships with UNDP and other United Nations system and local partners, as well as the generous contributions by host Governments made it possible to maintain the present level of operations by the network of United Nations information centres. Furthermore, increased reliance by the centres on new information and communications technology has helped defray in varied degrees the loss of human resources.

19. The bulk of the operating funds in 1999 was disbursed for the rental and maintenance of offices, reference libraries, meeting rooms and communications, as well as for acquisition and maintenance of data processing and office equipment. Some funds were allocated for translation and printing in local languages and for travel within the areas serviced by the information centres.

20. In 1999, the centres continued to benefit from the provision of information technology and office equipment. All information centres are now equipped with new computers, printers and other data-processing equipment. Most have access to the Internet and the number of web sites maintained by the centres continues to rise. Funds were allocated to train the staff of the information centres in the use of information technology for referencing, production and communications.

21. In 1999, the level of extrabudgetary funding has increased over the previous year's level. It should be emphasized that financial assistance provided by several host Governments has been invaluable to the information centres and their continued operation. In addition to annual financial contributions received from Governments, more than 30 Governments continue to provide information centres with rent-free premises, some Governments provide extrabudgetary posts and others provide ad hoc contributions for funding of special information projects. All these contributions are greatly appreciated. The annex to the present report provides a breakdown of assistance provided by host Governments to the centres during 1999.

Annex

Allocation of resources for rental of premises and host Government assistance

Centres	*Established*	*Department of Public Information posts (1999)*	*Rental of premises in 1999 (US$)*	*Host Government support*	
				Extrabudgetary staff	*Cash contribution received for 1999 (US$)*
Accra	March 1958	P-4, 5 local staff	Rent-free		
Algiers[a]	September 1963	2 local staff	Rent-free		
Ankara[a]	March 1975	2 local staff	7 500		
Antananarivo[a]	January 1963	2 local staff	6 500		
Asunción[a]	October 1962	2 local staff	16 000		
Athens	April 1954	P-5, 5 local staff	55 000		53 024.08
Beirut	September 1962	P-3, 4 local staff	Rent-free		
Bonn	January 1995	D-1, 3 local staff	Rent-free		
Brazzaville	June 1983	3 local staff	Rent-free		
Brussels	January 1975	5 local staff	110 000		65 594.74
Bucharest[a]	June 1970	1 local staff	Rent-free	2 local staff	31 834.97
Buenos Aires	November 1948	P-4, 5 local staff	Rent-free		70 140.28
Bujumbura	June 1961	2 local staff	Rent-free		Not received since 1992
Cairo[a]	April 1949	P-5, 5 local staff	1 265		234
Colombo[a]	August 1961	3 local staff	Rent-free		612
Copenhagen	December 1946	P-5, 5 local staff	Rent-free		Not received since 1998
Dakar	April 1964	3 local staff	Rent-free		
Dar es Salaam	June 1961	3 local staff	Rent-free		
Dhaka	August 1981	4 local staff	18 000		31 010.74
Harare	November 1982	P-5, 5 local staff	Rent-free		
Islamabad	March 1951	P-4, 4 local staff	12 318		7 390.68
Jakarta	August 1985	P-5, 3 local staff	Rent-free		
Kabul[b]	October 1959				
Kathmandu[a]	April 1964	2 local staff	4 000		Not received since 1993
Khartoum	October 1963	4 local staff	Rent-free		
Kinshasa[a]	July 1964	2 local staff	27 000		
Lagos	May 1967	P-5, 4 local staff	27 000	2 local staff	Not received for 1999
La Paz[a]	September 1963	3 local staff	8 300		Not received for 1999
Lima	April 1960	5 local staff	36 000		
Lisbon	November 1977	P-4, 3 local staff	Rent-free	2 local staff	71 568.45
Lome[a]	May 1962	4 local staff	Rent-free		
London	January 1947	D-1, 7 local staff	96 000		

Centres	*Established*	*Department of Public Information posts (1999)*	*Rental of premises in 1999 (US$)*	*Host Government support*	
				Extrabudgetary staff	*Cash contribution received for 1999 (US$)*
Lusaka	October 1975	3 local staff	Rent-free		
Madrid	May 1986	P-5, 5 local staff	Rent-free		24 183.19
Managua[a,b]	July 1984		Rent-free		Not received since 1995
Manama	November 1977		Rent-free	3 local staff	33 000
Manila	August 1953	4 local staff	Rent-free		
Maseru[a]	February 1979	3 local staff	Rent-free		
Mexico City	August 1947	P-5, 6 local staff	125 000		974.11
Monrovia[b]	October 1950				
Moscow	April 1948	D-1, 5 local staff	41 140		
Nairobi	August 1974	3 local staff	12 660		
New Delhi	January 1947	D-1, 5 local staff	Rent-free		
Ouagadougou	April 1982	P-4, 5 local staff	Rent-free		
Panama City[a]	September 1984	2 local staff	Rent-free	3 local staff	48 680
Paris	March 1947	D-1, P-3, 8 local staff	Rent-free		8 143.64
Port of Spain	January 1962	P-4, 4 local staff	41 000		1 932
Prague	December 1947	P-4, 4 local staff	200		46 107.14
Pretoria	March 1996	P-5, 3 local staff	Rent-free		
Rabat	December 1962	5 local staff	13 000		6 145
Rio de Janeiro	March 1947	P-5, 5 local staff	Rent-free		Not received since 1992
Rome	July 1958	D-1, 5 local staff	300		
Sana'a	April 1994	P-4, 2 local staff	Rent-free		
San Salvador[b]	July 1960				
Santa Fé de Bogotá	May 1954	P-5, 5 local staff	94 000		73 284
Sydney	November 1948	P-5, 5 local staff	53 000		
Tehran	May 1950	P-4, 2 local staff	90 000		
Tokyo	April 1958	D-1, 7 local staff	208 308		150 000
Tripoli	January 1980		Rent-free	3 local staff	349 223.58 (99/98)
Tunis	May 1960	4 local staff	Rent-free		
Warsaw	August 1995		Rent-free	3 local staff	49 549
Washington, D.C.	October 1946	D-1, P-4, 6 local staff	155 880		
Windhoek	October 1992	3 local staff	35		
Yangon[a]	June 1959	4 local staff	400		
Yaounde	October 1965	4 local staff	Rent-free		Not received since 1990

[a] Integrated centres.
[b] Not operational.